

This Week in Congress

February 22, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful.

Disaster Sign-up Coming in Mid-March

Last October, I helped shepherd through Congress drought assistance for farmers that have suffered from multiple years of drought. I have received many calls from Kansas farmers and their bankers, asking when disaster assistance would be available. Following my inquiry of top officials at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, they have confirmed to me that a sign-up should

begin the third week of March. The Crop Disaster Program (CDP) and the Livestock Assistance Program (LAP) will be administered in the same manner as 2002.

Producers incurring crop or quality losses that exceed 35 percent of historic yields due to damaging weather or drought in 2003 or 2004, will be eligible to sign up for disaster assistance payments. LAP provides assistance for livestock losses to producers for 2003 or 2004 in any county that has received an emergency designation by the President or the Secretary after January 1, 2003.

For additional information, as that date approaches, contact your local Farm Service Agency office.

Working for Kansans in Washington, D.C.

Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert has asked me to continue serving on the House Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs and Transportation Committees for this session of Congress. These committee assignments are important because they represent the priorities of many Kansans.

On the House Agriculture Committee, I will continue to serve as Chairman of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management. The subcommittee will play a prominent role in crafting the next farm bill. I will also serve as a member of the Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research Subcommittee and the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Dairy, Nutrition and Forestry. The protection and preservation of our farms and ranches is vital for the survival of the economy and our Kansas way of life.

I will also serve on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Within the committee, I will serve on the Subcommittee on Health and on the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. The Subcommittee on Health oversees the health care system for the Department of Veterans' Affairs, which serves nearly 250,000 veterans in Kansas. It is important that we do everything possible to guarantee that they receive the health care benefits and services they deserve for protecting our country.

Finally, I will continue serving on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, where I will serve on the Aviation; Railroad; and Highways, Transit and Pipelines Subcommittees. These subcommittee assignments are important to help ensure that the thousands of Kansans employed in the aviation field are represented during this changing time for the industry. It is also important as we work to pass a new federal transportation bill that will improve of country's highway infrastructure.

Discussing the Future of Railroad Service

This week, I joined several of my colleagues on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for the national conference of the American Association of Railroads. We discussed the challenges facing the railroad industry and received input on ways to improve this vital means of transportation for Kansas and the country.

In our state, many farmers and businesses depend on railroads to keep them connected to the national transportation network. Kansas has over 2,000 miles of short line railroad track, and ranks second in the nation in the amount of farm products it ships by rail. In 2004, legislation I introduced that will provide a tax credit to encourage investment in short line railroad infrastructure became law. In 2005, I will continue to look for ways to improve transportation and infrastructure needs that are important to our Kansas economy.

Meeting with Ambassador Allen Johnson

On Wednesday, I met with U.S. Ambassador Allen Johnson, Chief Agriculture Negotiator for the United States. Ambassador Johnson is responsible for conducting critical trade negotiations and enforcing trade agreements related to agriculture products. During the meeting, we discussed beef trade with Japan, the pending Brazilian cotton case, the timeline for future World Trade Organization negotiations and the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Ambassador Johnson has spent time in Kansas, meeting with producers, and understands the need to open foreign markets to our agriculture products. Kansas farmers benefit from higher prices when we can expand export markets for our surplus commodities. I look forward to working with Ambassador Johnson on these challenging issues facing our agriculture community.

Increasing Fines for FCC Violations

On Wednesday, I supported H.R. 310, the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2005. This legislation increases the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) maximum fine on broadcasters who violate indecency laws. The measure passed in the House and now moves to the Senate. Once finalized, violators of the law will face fines of up to \$500,000 for each violation.

In the Office

In from Hutchinson Community College were Dr. Ed Berger, President, and Bud Janner, board of trustees member, to talk about higher education issues, as were Pratt Community College representatives Darrell Shumway, board chair, Ken VanBlaricum, vice-chair, and members Gary Eppler and Larry Kiley. Also this week, Shannon Swayne and Jamie Brull, students at Thomas Moore Prep High School in Hays, were in the office with the Congressional Youth Leadership Conference.

Police Officer James Morton from Dodge City was in the office on behalf of the Kansas Fraternal Order of Police to discuss law enforcement issues. Richard Allen, CEO, Mercy Regional Health Center in Manhattan; Dr. Larry Anderson, Family Care Center in Wellington; Tom Bell, President, Kansas Hospital Association in Topeka; Rita Buurman, CEO, Sabetha Community Hospital in Sabetha; Dr. Robert Dorsey, Newman Regional Health in Emporia; Dennis George, CEO, Coffey County Hospital in Burlington; Dr. John Jeter, President/CEO, Hays Medical Center in Hays; Terry Lambert, CEO, Newman Regional Health in Emporia; Jerry Marquette, CEO, Coffeyville Regional Medical Center in Coffeyville; Paul Muraca, Region 6 Executive, American Hospital Association; David Nevill, President/CEO, Wesley Medical Center in Wichita; Dr. Kent Palmberg, Stormont-Vail HealthCare in Topeka; Randy Peterson, President/CEO, Salina Regional Health Center in Salina; Julie Quirin, President/CEO, Saint Luke's South Hospital in Overland Park; Cindy Samuelson, Vice President, Kansas Hospital Association in Topeka; Nancy Seelen, Saint Luke's South Hospital in Overland Park; Dr. Eric Voth, Stormont-Vail HealthCare in Topeka; and Steve Wilkinson, President/CEO, Menorah Medical Center, Overland Park were in representing the Kansas Hospital Association to discuss issues facing specialty hospitals in Kansas. Also in the office this week were Melinda Sorem from Jetmore and Ina Selfridge from Burdett, who are active in Kansas Women Involved in Farm Economics.

In for a tour of the U.S. Capitol this week were Lowell and Mary Thoman and their daughter Megan of Concordia and Jerry and Sandy Kinser also of Concordia. Tim and Rhonda Mehl from Beloit were also in for a tour, as were Rick Farris and his son J.J. of Edson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry